

VZCZCXRO2949  
OO RUEHQU  
DE RUEHPU #0532/01 0942133  
ZNY CCCCC ZZH  
O 032133Z APR 08  
FM AMEMBASSY PORT AU PRINCE  
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 8013  
INFO RUEHZH/HAITI COLLECTIVE PRIORITY  
RUEHBR/AMEMBASSY BRASILIA PRIORITY 1863  
RUEHSA/AMEMBASSY PRETORIA PRIORITY 1666  
RUEHQU/AMCONSUL QUEBEC PRIORITY 1089  
RUCNDT/USMISSION USUN NEW YORK PRIORITY 1481  
RUMIAAA/HQ USSOUTHCOM J2 MIAMI FL PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PORT AU PRINCE 000532

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE FOR WHA/EX AND WHA/CAR  
S/CRS  
INL FOR KEVIN BROWN AND ANGELIC YOUNG  
SOUTHCOM ALSO FOR POLAD  
STATE PASS AID FOR LAC/CAR  
INR/IAA  
WHA/EX PLEASE PASS USOAS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 04/03/2018

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [ECON](#) [HA](#)

SUBJECT: COST OF LIVING INCREASES IGNITE PROTESTS IN LES  
CAYES

REF: A. A. PORT AU PRINCE 00424

[1](#)B. B. PORT AU PRINCE 00528

PORT AU PR 00000532 001.2 OF 002

Classified By: Classified By: Ambassador Janet A. Sanderson for reasons  
1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (SBU) Summary: Mounting frustration toward the government for its failure to sufficiently address the rapid cost of living increases throughout Haiti ignited violent protests in Les Cayes April 3. Peaceful protests in Gonavives were also reported. Apparently organized protestors blocked roads in Les Cayes and besieged MINUSTAH headquarters there, damaged the perimeter wall and some vehicles, but did not breach the building. MINUSTAH believes that demonstrators in Les Cayes used MINUSTAH Headquarters as a target of opportunity rather than a conscious protest against the foreign presence in Haiti. Initial assessments from MINUSTAH and GOH sources indicate that forces from or close to the pro-Aristide party Fanmisyon Lavalas organized the protests. Media reported that the Prime Minister called an emergency cabinet meeting to determine how to best quell the violence and address the severe economic situation throughout the country. End summary.

[1](#)2. (U) Beginning early in the morning of April 3, hundreds of rioters took to the streets of Lasavane, a slum area in Les Cayes, capital city of the South Department, chanting "la vie che, la vie che!" ("Cost of living!"). Angry that the government of Haiti has still not sufficiently addressed the rising cost of living and lack of employment, demonstrators took their frustrations out on MINUSTAH, surrounded its headquarters in Les Cayes damaging, and destroying some of its property.

[1](#)3. (SBU) A high-level MINUSTAH official reported to poloff that starting from 1:30 a.m. April 3 in the slum (and Lavalas stronghold) of Lasavane, protestors attacked UNPOL security forces with rocks and molotov cocktails, just as these forces began removing protestors, barricades made of rocks and tires. UNPOL was unable to prevent demonstrators

from blocking the main access roads to Les Cayes. MINUSTAH reports that the airport in Les Cayes, however, is still functioning and its security has not been altered.

14. (SBU) At about 0900 hrs, a MINUSTAH official told poloff that some 200 protesters had surrounded its headquarters in an attempt to break into the building. UNPOL secured control over the perimeter of the building which demonstrators were unable to penetrate. Rioters damaged two fences, and set fire to 2 vehicles, a tent and a shipping container.

15. (C) Les Cayes, Mayor Yvon Chery told poloff April 3 that he had contacted the Ministry of Interior that very day in a plea for the GOH to address the cost of living situation and lack of jobs. He thought the situation was under control and the HNP were playing a proactive role by maintaining security and keeping the protesters calm. He claimed that when it became evident that the protest was growing, he rushed to the local radio and encouraged demonstrators to go home -- to no avail. Chery told poloff he speculates that if there is any group with political motivations for sparking protests, the culprit would certainly be Fanmi Lavalas (FL) (Note: Several MINUSTAH sources report that FL is behind this planned protest. End note).

16. (C) MINUSTAH sources tell us that in response to reports of attempts to break into MINUSTAH headquarters in Les Cayes, UN Force Commander dos Santos Cruz traveled there to assess the situation on the ground. Cruz reported to the Ambassador mid-afternoon April 3 that MINUSTAH had regained control over the situation, and had ordered the deployment of two platoons and a Formed Police Unit (FPU), which would be on the ground within an hour. He reiterated that MINUSTAH was not/not targeted, but was rather a target of opportunity

PORT AU PR 00000532 002.2 OF 002

used to bring attention to the severe economic situation.

17. (C) Cruz also told Ambassador that in a private Conversation, Presidential Advisor Bob Manuel told him that the government would begin to "activate the political process" in response to the cost of living situation. In a separate conversation with the Ambassador, Manuel highlighted his belief that the protests were organized by the FL "troublemakers" from the 2004-2005 era, but he did not seem particularly disturbed by the events.

18. (C) Comment: MINUSTAH officials told poloffs that the protests came as no real surprise, given the severity of the cost of living situation and widespread complaints. The inability for the government, particularly the parliament, to stop internal bickering and address the poor economy and other problems facing the country has shortened patience among man (ref. B).

SANDERSON